

A Visitor from the Provinces

See, feel. My skin maps my journey. This scar?
A gift from the orbital wire. These Keltic knots?
Ink, pricked in with a treadle-driven needle
by a shaman in a studio near Mankestar.
This burn? Sparks; a Sheffeel foundry fire.

Look how I shimmer. Northers' faces flicker,
glitchy as CGI, but all seems digitized
beyond the ring road frontier. It's like one
borderless low-res monitor, from horizon
to evening star. I've watched stormclouds

shuffle like touchscreen icons over Kumbria,
seen crowds on the terraces at Old Traffer
fracture into pixellated planes and angles,
fizz like the scrolling streets and jungles
of a Microsoft-era first person shooter.

Yet Northers are flesh! We laugh, shout, sigh,
chatter in Yorktongue, Brummagem and Jordi.
Our blood's rusty. Our tears taste of the sea.
I know, for last summer, I kissed raw salt
from the woaded cheek of the lass

I left in Rockdale. My Trace. We married;
keyed vows into a consecrated laptop
preserved from the petroleum age.
Our son, Arun, is already a novice priest,
learning to subroutine, firewall and hack.

I have trekked leagues on fur-wrapped feet,
crossed the M25 kill lanes, climbed the wire,
shed skin, to transmit to you this heresy:
The North is real, Lunnnon the simulation!
Your city is a matrix of zeroes and ones.